

Orford Conservation Commission
Approved Meeting Minutes May 7, 2026
Meeting held in person in Niles Room at the Town Offices and via Zoom

Commissioners Present: Regular members: Bob Hedges (Chair), Ted Cooley (Vice-Chair), Chris Gothberg, Dave Hubbard, Adair Mulligan; Harry Pease; Alternates: Emily Bryant, John Miller, Fran Plaisted, and Earl Johnson via zoom

Others present: Charlie Smith (Selectboard representative).

1. Call to Order: 6:31 PM. Emily and John were seated as Commissioners.

2. Approve Minutes:

- a. Minor change on Page 2 item e) iv. *Harry moved that we approve minutes as amended. Chris seconded. Motion carried.*

3. Regular Business:

- a. **Rivendell Trails Association(RTA) update:** Dave provided an update from the RTA 4/19/2026 annual meeting. The RTA bylaws were updated. New RTA board was voted in. Good forward momentum. A Rivendell Trail workday is scheduled for 5/9/2026.
- b. **Hike Orford Lyme Forest event on April 25:** Chris provided a report. 8 people attended. Tour of old homestead. This was a 6 mile hike. For future hikes, Adair suggested that we have a shorter hiking option possible.
- c. **Northeast Wilderness Trust (NEWT) Spruce Ridge hike:** John reported on the NEWT hike. Same date and time as the Hike Orford event above. Good group and similar route to the fall outing along Mason Pond (15 attendees- some from surrounding towns).
- d. **Next Hike Orford event:** Hiking the Appalachian Trail Atwell Hill/Ore Hill section. Date will be Sunday 5/24/2026, 2:30 PM. Will be a point-to-point hike on the AT starting at Rte25A, ending in Warren on 25C - about 5 miles. We will need to coordinate car drop off/shuttling hikers.
- e. **Report out on 4/26/2026 Trail Work at Richmond (AKA Orford Conservation Land) property:** Harry reported that he, David, and Craig Putnam cleaned up the trail. We now need to maintain it every few weeks. Terry Dyke will do mowing of parking lot and along the edge of the field and submit invoices to OCC through Esther.
- f. **Upcoming Trail Work Planning:** Chris reported on plans for a June 27 workday on the upper section of Cube Cross Rivendell Trail (CRT) section, narrowing corridor and adding water bars etc.
Also need trail work volunteers to remove fence 8' tall on Cross-Rivendell Trail near Townshed Rd. Chris will obtain contact info for landowner to discuss removing the fence. Adair asked whether we could find a use for the removed fence.
Chris will plan to brush the Orford Heritage Trail.
- g. **NEWT Planning for the Spruce Ridge property:** Bob met with Dave Mallard, the new NEWT stewardship director for their Northern New England properties, which includes Spruce Ridge. Dave will be developing their master plan for what they are going to do. The plan will incorporate ideas and feedback from the OCC. NEWT has arranged for 3 days with 25 volunteers in late August to build out trails and work on the parking lot off the end of Mousley Brook Road towards Mason Pond. We need to include Ted Nutter in any plans and for potential resources on parking lot etc.

- h. **New Connecting Trails on Stonehouse Mountain (UVLT) and Spruce Ridge (NEWT):** Bob and Jason Berard (UVLT) hiked, tracked with GPS, and flagged a new route from the “lollipop” trail intersection half way up the Stonehouse Mtn Trail, heading due north to connect with the East-West snowmobile trail running from Mason Pond to Lower Stonehouse Mountain Road. This proposed route is to the west of the original planned route. It includes some very interesting terrain. They will finish flagging it tomorrow. People can follow the flags and make suggestions to finalize the route in May. Then we can plan the required collaboration with NEWT and workdays for the summer of 2026.
- i. **Upper Valley Trails Alliance (UVTA) Proposal for Trail Work on the Orford Heritage Trail:** Chris, Bob, and UVTA representatives hiked the Orford Heritage Trail from Indian Pond Road to Grimes Hill Road to see what trail maintenance work needs to be done. The trail needs significant ditching and drainage work in many places. UVTA has suggested Bog Bridges or rerouting the trail to deal with train drainage issues. UVTA have one trail workday by the summer Trail Corps available if we can get back to them soon. Cost is \$500/ workday. Bog bridges cost \$100 per 10 feet. If we hired UVTA staff, it would cost \$1280 for 2 staff for 2 days. We thought that it would be best to chip away at the tasks rather than do them all in one year.
Ted moved that we use \$2500 in OCC funds to pay for a UVTA Trail Corps workday and associated costs, to improve the Heritage Trail, for instance with bog bridges. Chris is to work out the details. Adair seconded. Motion carried.
- j. **Annual UVLT/OCC Stargazing Party:** The target date for our annual event is Sunday 8/9/2026 with a rain date of 8/10/2026. UVLT has arranged for Bobby Farlice-Rubio to lead the program again.
- k. **Birding Outings:** Working on setting up a date for bird outing. Trying to get a date for Jeff MacQueen to return for birding day. Earl is planning to return in August and will do a birding date once his schedule is confirmed.
- l. **Invasive Species:** Emily is working on map of where we see invasives in town. John reviewed sites. We need to enlist public participation, but it is hard to convince public of need. We need to educate construction crews on not transferring soil from construction sites to avoid spreading knotweed. Two new highway/road projects are of particular concern -- the highway bridge at Archertown and Dublin Roads (underway) and the future trail bridge on High Bridge Road (planned for late 2026 or 2027). We agreed that Emily will enlarge the invasives map for these areas. David, Bob, and John will flag the knotweed in these areas. Charlie will notify the Select Board about these issues.
- m. **Planned NEWT Cement Silos Hike:** Sue Kling from the Orford Free Library will be leading a Summer Reading Program youth hike out to the Cement Silos Sat August 15th and NEWT will send representative. All OCC members are encouraged to join.
- n. **High Bridge Project:** We are on hold until we locate a vendor to do the stone abutment work. Bill Wanner has offered to help find someone to do the stonework.

New Business:

Adair reported that the **CT River Conservancy** is having an explanation and demonstration at 10 AM on 5/18 of what they and NRCS have done regarding restoration on the Washburn property.

4. Adjourn: *Ted moved to adjourn the meeting; Chris seconded. The motion carried unanimously.*

Meeting was adjourned at 8:07 PM.

Minutes taken by Fran Plaisted and Emily Bryant